The Interspecies Newsletter

Spring 1992

Published Quarterly by Interspecies Communication Inc.

The Dolphin Conference

There is, in Australia, a small group of dolphin and whale aficionados who collectively call themselves **The International Cetacean Education and Research Center.** Because it is such a long name, the organization has adopted the acronym ICERC, pronounced: *I Search* or *isearch.* ICERC recently sponsored their **Third International Dolphin and Whale Conference** in a massive, cast-concrete metaphor for paradise called the Kona Surf hotel and located on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Most of the presenters at the weeklong conference spoke about various dolphin and whale research projects now manifesting or simply being dreamed up for all points of the compass. For those readers who follow the human/cetacean interface, the speakers included, among many others, Rick O'Barry, Betsy Smith, John Lilly, Paul Spong, Joan Ocean, Horace Dobbs, Robbins Barstow, and yours truly.

But that is not what this conference report is about.

On the last day of the conference it suddenly dawned on me that the majority of the presentations differed markedly from the usual brand of expert-driven, oceanographic research. What was being presented here was not so much *RESEARCH*, (with all its big-science, control-oriented, objectivist baggage), but rather *isearch*, a new noun that seems to lean heavily on the experiential, participatory, sunny side of life. Isearch articulates a worldview primarily in the domain of radical educators, Earth artists, health therapists, and deep ecologists.

This occasionally unnerving lover of puns tips his hat to ICERC. Not only do they pull off a splendid dolphin and whale conference, but their very name offers a striking semantic reference point for the new worldview being promoted. Nice trick if you can get away with it.

This was the third ICERC conference. Perhaps the key element distinguishing it from the two earlier events, was the pervasive presence of the Japanese conferees, all seemingly representing the germination of a long-awaited transformation in the Japanese cultural relationship to whales and dolphins. Much was made and said of the Japanese presence at this ICERC conference, although it can all be boiled down to yet another profound word: **welcome.**

Our Japanese brothers and sisters at the conference seemed to know very little about the the Western World's ongoing love affair with dolphins and whales, although they were obviously quite touched by it. This sense of newness seemed especially ironic in light of the continuous media barrage the Japanese people have endured at the hands of Western environmental groups over the past twenty years. Then again, perhaps not so strange when we realize that most of this media has been decidedly anti-whaling instead of pro-whale.

Perhaps unfortunately, most of the Western environmental groups who have worked so hard over the years to change the Japanese relationship to cetaceans have focused mostly on political, economic, and environmental exigencies; and to the glaring detriment of the personal, the intuitive, and the spiritual relationship. If this strategy has failed (and indeed it has, given

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the undeniable fact that Japan is still planet Earth's predominant whale killer), then it is because it impose a new paradigm on the Japanese from the outside in, and from the top down. In fact, the strategy may have detered the very wary, face-saving Japanese from eliciting change on their own behalf. On the other hand, it did set the stage for the next phase. The isearch phase.

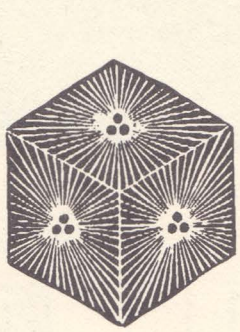
Form or Content

Viewed through the eyes of a Westerner, Japan's tenacious support of its whaling industry has never made very much sense. It is an issue so bound up in the inscrutably non-western character of Japanese culture that trying to translate it into English usually ends up explaining little, while assuring that everybody on both sides of the issue gets angry.

So let's reverse the perspective. Seen through Japanese eyes, the resistence to Western pressure reveals one overlooked aspect of the continued international stalemate: the Japanese prediliction for favoring form over content. This is a critical proclivity of their culture, although it is too often glossed over by an international environmental community that seeks reform through logical argument—that seeks change without much regard for the unique societal context that drives any move toward change.

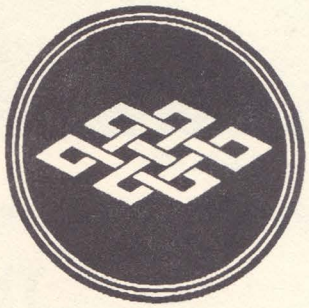
For just one example of this tenet, I spent most of two years working to stop the killing of dolphins by fishermen at Iki island, Japan. During that time, I heard many fishermen, bureaucrats, scientists, and lay people sincerely apologize to me for "having to kill dolphins" which was often followed by the injunction that "We Japanese must soon stop the shameful business of killing whales and dolphins".

However, I was no disinterested party, but rather a professional environmentalist in the land of the anti-whale. I eventually realized, after relying too many times on too many false pledges of support, that these courteous Japanese aquaintances were simply telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. But they weren't lying. They were, instead, being courteous. The congenial context of our discussions was far more important to them than the subject matter. In other words: they were stressing form over content.



Dice of Good Luck

Amulet for Protection



Sign for Longevity;

Japanese 19th Century

When I questioned these same apologists a bit deeper, they usually acknowledged that a majority of the Japanese people stood in favor of continued whaling. A few even confessed to me that as long as Westerners criticised Japanese marine mammal policies, the government would never quit. Never. This pessimistic conclusion because, within Japan, criticism evokes the strong reaction known as *saving face*. Saving face often gets interpreted as a more important ethical issue than even the extinction of species.

Saving face also causes the Japanese Government to act as if the so-called "problem" of whaling is largely a problem of containing foreign criticism.

Subsequently, the so-called facts that define the issues at stake rarely get debated within Japan. Neither the ghastly economic futility of the slaughter, nor the simple right to life of the whales, are ever discussed as much more than "what foreigners believe." By contrast, to debate the actual issues at stake would mean, to accept culpability—to invite a loss of face. Once again, we are confronted by form over content.

As a people, the Japanese are much more of an extended family than anything we Americans can rightly comprehend. The tribe that is Japan tends to rise up to protect its members, especially when protection pertains to cultural traditions under foreign attack. In the case of whaling, stubborn family support continues, because this is a cherished cultural enterprise with a long history.

Despite the focus on business (that which we in the West call Japan Inc.), whaling has never been a simple economic issue. And Western environmentalists who steer the debate toward the economic dead-end of an industry relying on a depleted resource, don't advance the cause very much. The whaling issue is more about culture and ethics, and less about business. Actually, if the decision to continue whaling actually did pivot on straight ahead economic logic, the killing would have stopped a generation ago. How could anyone expect any less from the country that gave the world the Honda Accord?

The mismatch of root-cause perceptions has also caused an insufferable paradox to develop within the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the forum where the life and death of whales is ultimately regulated. Like any "official" international body, the IWC demands that the Japanese contingent base its pro-whaling rationale on internationally-apropos forms—mostly meaning economics, law,

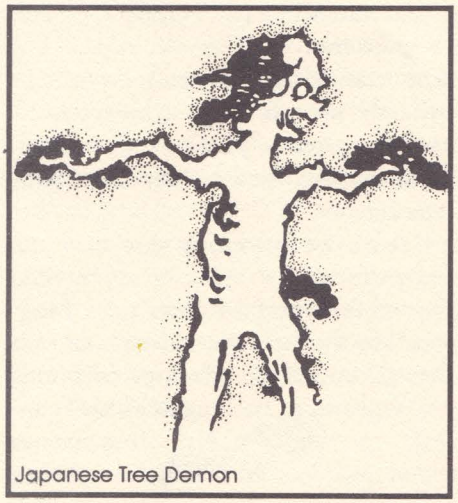
and science—which are, in the most general sense, the political mechanisms accepted by officialdom worldwide to steer debates towards the logical. Unfortunately, such formats effectively diminish the spiritual value of sentient creatures (like whales) in favor of administrable legalities.

Here's a tongue twister used to make a point. The IWC forum, puts its formal emphasis on forms and formats formalized in the formulation of content. It acts as though its content-heavy format is universal when in fact it is mostly arbitrary, a format first formalized by the nineteenth century British.

Because the Japanese contingent instead favors form over content, they put a very different spin on the rules, which the Western members then perceive as a deceitful obfuscation of the issues. The Japanese, of course, argue that they are not obfuscating anything.

Tragically, the latest result is a mutant hybrid of Western science and Japanese whaling called *scientific whaling*. What it means is that the continued slaughter of endangered whales has been successfully championed by the Japanese contingent as the best scientific means available to keep track of the depleted populations. The morally offensive concept known as scientific whaling might be understood as the Japanese means of translating their cultural mandate into international legal terms.

Make no mistake about it, the Japanese have indeed told the rest of the world that, on their own, and if there were no strict international sanctions against it, they would just as soon keep on killing whales right up to the point of biological extinction. Argue any other point of view, as many articulate men and women have been doing within the IWC for a generation, and you very quickly reach a political, economic, and moral stalemate.


Japanese Tree Demon

Japan also seems to hold the IWC's trump card: threatening to quit that body altogether unless concessions are made. And yet without the IWC, it seems improbable that any government would censure the Japanese economic power over an issue such as whaling. A perusal of the United State's hypocritical unwillingness to apply any of it's own anti-whaling sanctions that are already law, should make that quite evident.

The Bite of Finality

Now let's delve a bit deeper. If we regard the IWC form-and-content stalemate as a metaphysical difference of opinion, we soon uncover a far more subtle aspect of the problem. Someone seeking an explanation to Japan's horrific whaling policy might argue that a culture whose religion (Buddhism) promotes reincarnation, might conceivably view the issue of extinction without the bite of finality that it holds within our own linear, Christian, and scientifically-based culture. This statement is not meant to imply that Buddhism actually teaches anything of the sort, or that the Japanese are even very religious. Rather, reincarnation is one absolutist background hum of their culture—the way that such constructs as "progress" or "redemption" are background hums in our own.

In my own naivete, I once presented this metaphysical suspicion in the form of a paper delivered at a meeting of the IWC. I was practically hooted off the podium by a very upset Japanese delegation. This caused the moderator to demand that I please refrain my remarks to the pertinent issue on the floor. I was perhaps young enough, and intimidated enough to step down from the podium before finishing. But I was not being "impertinent", although, certainly, I had stepped far outside the fine line of acceptable international topics. In fact, the discussion on the floor at the time focused on why the Japanese would not abide by a whaling moratorium recommended by nearly all the rest of the member nations. Obviously, a metaphysical analysis didn't count for much.

The Tough Guy

Given this very cursory reading of the problem, you may well ask how this admittedly idealistic analyst would propose we get the Japanese out of whaling? If you had asked me that question before the ICERC conference, I would have answered that the environmental community needs to act as if the Japanese are locked in a classic case of addiction denial. I have always regarded whaling as a neurotic addiction not that unlike, for example, all of our neurotic addiction to fossil fuels. Both describe an unconscionable disregard for the welfare of future generations.

Another clear symptom of whaling denial, is the fact that Japanese leaders do not wish to hear any point of view other than their own. Likewise, Japan's reliance on bastardized science and a legislative cynicism towards international protocol will always inhibit the effectiveness of the IWC.

Actually, to stop whaling may go a long way towards opening up international discussions to concepts beyond the legal, the scientific, and the economic—and towards concepts like compassion. And especially concepts like the sacred. If so, then how do we convince the Japanese that a moratorium on whaling does not place their way of life at risk. Or for that matter, how do we convince any of our international governing bodies that a long view based on the sacred, dramatically enhances the vitality and validity of international protocol?

Specifically, where is the positive strategy that supports both Japanese culture and the protection of whales?

Nuperabbo Festish Japan 19th Century

Before the ICERC conference I would have answered that there is no positive solution. Before the ICERC conference I believed that the international community's long term strategy to stop whaling needs to get *less* diplomatic and focus *more* on making the international criticism against the killing a greater threat to Japanese security than permitting whalers the continued privilege of killing them. Because of the Japanese' historic inability to even hear the terms of the debate, I always felt that if they did stop whaling, it would be because of a worsening international image problem and not because of any change of heart.

Before ICERC, I believed that we as individuals—as citizens and consumers, rather than as governments—needed to put the Japanese more at risk. We need to take a tough stand. Those of us who loved a world with whales had to get organized far in excess of the successful campaign to make the American tuna companies "dolphin safe". We would literarily have to shut down one of the Japanese industrial giants. Are the whales worth a combined American and European Christmas without Japanese electronics? What other option was there? As I spun out this scenario, I imagined my own unborn great-grandchildren cheering me on.

Isearch Projects

The positive presence of so many Japanese whale lovers at the ICERC conference turned out to be a personal revelation for me. I realized that I have been harboring much anger toward this faceless whale-killing image of Japan for over fifteen years now. By the last day of the conference, after so much discussion about the Japanese people and government so ripe for change, it suddenly dawned on me that the hoped-for positive transformation in Japanese/cetacean relations is already in the works. The Japanese presenters substantiated my long-held suspicion that the change will not develop specifically through scientific, educational, political, or economic channels.

It is instead, cultural, individuistic, and experiential. In other words there is a very strong chance that the transformation I anticipate will include all the detritus of Western whale and dolphin love.

It is about the life-enhancing media images of whales alive, about whale watching, about closing down oceanariums, about swimming with dolphins in the wild, about deep ecology, about the new earth-centered healing therapies, and about the many contemporary mystery schools that try to explain what the large brained cetaceans might be thinking about. And it is still very much underground.

I also believe that the new, still unformed Japanese relationship to whales and dolphins is right now on the verge *of being invented*. That choice of words may seem strange at first, but not so much when we realize that the Japanese conferees were predominantly Media professionals seeking a new life-enhancing slant to what has always been a deadly and antagonistic issue.

The conferees included TV personalities, writers, media producers, and even a translator of English language books about deep ecology. These are people in the precise business of remolding cultural metaphors. Likewise, the conference, itself, very definitely favored the cutting edge of human/cetacean relations. The emphasis was on experience and relationship. The goal was to present cetaceans as one major reflection of the sacred that exists within all nature.

By conference end, I was convinced that the Japanese attended the conference because the isearch channel (as opposed to the research channel) is the one that makes the most sense to them. The potential solution that emerged after nearly a week of presentations is that now is the time to sidestep political, economic, scientific, legal, top-down, outside-in, solutions. Let us all speak, instead, directly to the heart of the people.

Most notably, the next ICERC conference is already planned for Tokyo sometime in 1993. Stay tuned.

—Jim Nollman

In the Swim

Along with all the other aspects of cetacean lore, there is also, within Japan, a growing interest in the general subject of interspecies communication. It thus seems no coincidence that both of my books, *Dolphin Dreamtime* and *Spiritual Ecology*, have recently been translated into Japanese.

On that note, Interspecies Communication Inc. has just been invited to produce a series of media presentations in Japan for next October; co-sponsored by Tokyo's largest FM radio station and Sony. In a greater sense, the invitation also signifies that IC has been asked to play an active role in inventing the new relationship with cetaceans.

After we principals discussed the straightforward idea of slide presentations and TV interviews, I suggested to the Japanese sponsors that we all might consider producing a swimming pool concert, a "Bathing in Music" concert, a concert in interspecies communications art where the audience

puts on bathing suits and drops into a swimming pool while musicians jam in real time with recorded whale vocalizations piped into the water.

Perhaps fortunately, there is a very successful precedent for such a crazy idea. IC musician and media artist, Mickey Remann, did the first underwater concert in Frankfurt Germany back in 1986. The best short description of that earlier event comes from Mickey himself, here quoted from a much longer article about the concerts that originally appeared in the Winter 1987 issue of the Interspecies Newsletter.

"After I had the good fortune of joining the IC Orca Project, and after having played music with free, wild whales every night for hours on end, I felt three things distinctly:

1. This is fantastic
2. I want to tell everybody
3. Nobody will believe me

"What to do? Trying to import anybody's hometown (in this case Frankfurt Germany) out into the wilderness seemed less than appropriate so I decided to try it the other way around; to bring into the city the real taste of free music and free whales. A spirited group of Frankfurt artists had accepted our invitation to play and perform in, under, and above the water; employing voice, instruments, sculpture, dance and a lot of pioneering improvization."

The German concerts were staged in two adjoining Olympic size swimming pools and sold out two shows to nearly 1000 participants. They also became an instant media event all over Northern Europe; the subject of massive news coverage and even a delayed satellite broadcast to (you guessed it) Japan.

As we go to press, the possibility of producing an underwater concert in Tokyo (with underwater sound design by the best Sony has to offer), is still in the works. More on this in the next Interspecies Newsletter.

Talking to Cabbages

I've just begun writing a new book, entitled: ***A Sense of Place****Gardening, Ecology, and Attitude. Here's an excerpt that plays with the outer reaches of the stated theme, and which relates directly to the substance of this organization.*

Someone once said that the essential trait of gardening is the control of nature by humans. Our culture's flamboyant use of pesticides and fertilizers bears testimony to the fact that many gardeners obviously agree with this definition of it. I'm part of a growing minority that disagrees. I rarely feel like a despot; but often like a nurturing parent, and occasionally like a love slave. To me, the very best trait of gardening is the control of humans by nature.

Someone else once said: the more you know, the less you know. In my case, the more gardening knowledge I accrue, the less objective I feel towards my garden. I suppose I might be called a knowledgeable gardener; able to rattle off the latin names and the growing traits of most any plant you put in front of me. Yet lately, I find myself relating to these "specimen" quite sentimentally—as if the plants were neighbors, friends, confidants; each of them possessed of its own individual personality. I even wonder if the Vegetarians have gotten it all wrong because, in fact, plants are every bit as sentient as animals, albeit quieter and far less restless. Isn't that the reason a sizeable minority of gardeners talk to their plants? We do talk to them, you know, although most of us won't admit it.

I am out on a limb here. Many sober people refuse to grant sentience to monkeys, while this author is asking you to ascribe it to vegetables, fruit, flowers. For that matter, if plants are capable of self awareness, why isn't this attribute expressed more generally in the literature? In fact, *Fine Landscaping, Horticulture,* and *Country Living,* have been remarkably silent about it. We read about it, instead, in "underground classics" like *The Secret Life of Plants.* What's the secret?

My claim for plant sentience is exotic enough that it deserves a careful example. On that note, let's forget about brainpower for the moment, and just confront the less exalted issue of plant personality.

Take cabbages. Every cabbage seed in a packet is not a clone of every another one. I say they are as unique as human babies are unique; as unpredictable in their growth patterns as the weather that nurtures them. Two cabbage seeds, planted just eighteen inches apart, will grow in two different ways. One sprints to a broad four inches and remains that way for two weeks or more. Meanwhile, the other one grows spindly, and falls prey to slugs. Then one day, I pay a visit to the garden and notice that the cabbage that was so chewed up as a sprout has grown strong, just to protect itself from further predation. This one now grows quickly. I harvest it at a whopping six pounds on the last day of July. The heart is as perfect as one might hope from an organic cabbage.

Meanwhile, the other cabbage takes its sweet time to mature. I sometimes have to catch myself from whispering sweet nothings in its nonexistent ear; *whispering,* mostly because I don't want any of my human neighbors to hear me. This second cabbage is harvested ten days later than the first, also at six pounds. My wife shreds it into cole slaw. My kids say "blessings on the meal" and we eat it. It tastes superb. Life is perfect.

A few weeks later, at a neighborly barbecue, I drink two glasses of wine which soon causes me to relate the two cabbage story to the general throng. Someone mentions the auspicious timing of the ripening. Could there be something to it? Hmmmm? Now that you mention it, my family *does* prefer its cabbage just about once every ten days.

That's the case for personalities. Now let's enter the twilight zone. You may suspect that this gardener is about to announce that his whispery coaching

somehow *caused* those two cabbages to mature at such a perfect ten day interval. Suddenly trumpets start blaring: direct human-to-plant communication may be coming to bear here. This is no longer a simple matter of plant personalities, but rather a claim for full-blown consciousness. Call it herbaceous ettiquette. And I always wondered why they call them "heads" of cabbage. Some people spend their lives unsuccessfully trying to communicate to their spouse or their kids. Other people believe that the government should invest more of its so-called defense dividend to communicating with dolphins because the species holds the key to planetary bliss. This crazy gardener is asking you to believe that cabbages do it just as well.

But let's remain skeptical a moment. What other stretches of elasticised logic might explain the case of the synchronized cabbages? For instance, what about pure and simple circumstance. Maybe so, maybe so.

Better yet, let's uncork that other splendid debunker of metaphysical eccentricity—you guessed it, we love it—modern science. Actually, this assertion of mine is precisely the kind of conundrum that keeps the likes of Carl Sagan off the streets. I imagine Carl pulling out a little soil tester, tromping down my garden path, sticking the meter into the two empty holes where cabbages once flourished, and noting the slight variations between them. I watch as Alice's red queen soon shows up and remarks to Carl: "that's the most important piece of evidence yet."

Carl finally corners me to ask a few friendly questions. "If this assertion of your is correct, then we must also assume that you are affecting the eating habits of hundreds upon hundreds of insects as well. Do you seriously believe those whispery conversations controlled the culinary druthers of slugs and the cabbage moth larvae?"

I have nothing to say in my defense, so Carl blithely continues. "Or for that matter, how do you explain the fact that the more southerly cabbage casts a slight shadow over the northern one, occasionally blocking the sun and shielding the drying effects of the prevailing wind. Explain that one!"

What Carl seems to be saying is that botanical evidence clearly suggests any number of other factors affecting the ripening of cabbages. In a larger sense, he's prescribing botany's own objective remedy to the common malady known as after-the-fact wishful thinking. I stand guilty of the common human ailment of applying cause and effect sentience to my own desires.

Not so fast, Carl. Traditional people around the world have always asserted that the process of food gathering is an act of gift giving from prey to person. Life is sacred, and there are relationships waiting to be honored everywhere we look. The predator who expresses gratitude for the gift receives more gifts. The predator who forgets to acknowledge the gift suffers dire consequences. Some people believe the environmental crisis is a direct result of our culture forgetting this simple blessing. The very idea of plant and animal consciousness, including acknowledging the gift of food, promotes an atmosphere of mutual esteem wherever the relationship is honored.

Ironically, the positive effect this currently naive belief *could* exert on society may be even more important to the welfare of the planet in this late twentieth century than our society's unswerving desire to debunk it wherever it rears its nonlinear head.

Science confuses me. Are we expressing truth when we replace traditional values with cold hard data—no matter how helpful the original belief may have been to the believers, the community, and the ecosystem? I tend to regard my cabbage anecdote as a kind of ecological *myth* (like the well known case of the 100th monkey) whose value—as with most myths— sometimes offers more to a person, than its debunking ever could. I *want* to believe in this idea of negotiated relations between human and cabbage, and thus, I continually find myself promoting its expression, even if my logical education must constantly remind me that I have my head screwed on backwards. It still makes far more ecological sense than promoting nature as a harvest of names, categories, and resources.

Food *should* be a conscious gift from other living beings and not just wrapped slabs at the local market. I feel bubbly admiration for the vegetables I grow myself. Perhaps luckily, I find enough other gardeners who treat their plants the exact same way. I even know a few people who pray to their plants. I once kissed a remarkably red tomato. I once hugged a beautiful hubbard squash. But that's where I draw the line.

This way of thinking can get downright tricky. The more I face up to my own willful bias towards the helpful and away from the merely factual, the more I also discover that these relationships are just as much about straightforward truth as they are about Utopian ethics, myth-making, and simple faith. We (meaning the cabbages and my family) *are* rooting each other on to live a harmonious lifestyle.

If so, then you may well ask by what means I reckon my own human/cabbage scheduling agreement to have been communicated. Sorry to prove so dumbfounded every time the question comes up, but I have no answer to that. Perhaps, inscrutably, I feel bound to add that my answer is not quite the same thing as admitting I do not know. In all due humilty, I often visualize an unspoken (and mostly subconscious) wish to have the harvest turn out just perfectly.

But this is no hocus-pocus. I offer no burnt offerings, don no feathers, bend no elbows to the four directions. I am not implying, by any stretch of the imagination however, that there is anything wrong with spicing up your life with some good, healthy hocus-pocus.

Nor do I possess a hidden agenda of promoting myself as a new generation of consciousness athlete. Rather, let me muddy the issue by simply concluding that whenever people feel something with a passion, whatever it may be, their

sentiment does accrue gravity in the real world. People do cure themselves of cancer. Cabbages do communicate. And not only cabbages, mind you, but whole gardens, orchards and landscapes. All harmonizing together in concert. Let the mountains ring.

But quiet down a moment, ye mountains. Carl wants to ask another question. Go ahead Carl.

"Ascribing consciousness to cabbages is a lot for me to swallow. But ascribing consciousness to an entire garden is, well, it's simply beyond belief. But for the sake of argument, let's assume that what you claim is true. If so, then at what point in the process of constructing a garden from scratch, do you think this bold leap to wholistic sentience occurs? Is it sudden? Gradual? And to what extent is the mind of the gardener tangled up in the process? For instance, is it just gardens that are loved intensely, sweated over profusely, or admired roundly that ever gain consciousness?"

Carl, your questions make me feel like I'm some kind of horticultural Frankenstein, sewing stems and flowers and roots together, giving them a jolt of electricity, and then forever agonizing how to get control over my creation. Sorry, but this implication leads us nowhere because it presupposes that I am describing some kind of robotic (biotic, herbotic) garden.

On the other hand, let me share a little secret with you, Carl, that never quite made it into *The Secret Life of Plants*. My cabbages once whispered to me that they long suspected that *individual* humans are conscious. However, they were genuinely shocked when I had to break the news to them that the whole of human society is not yet possessed of a group consciousness. You want to know how those cabbages responded to that one, Carl. They sighed a while, and then simply said, "We don't get it. It's so...so basic." I tell you, their words nearly broke my heart.

In that same light, let me me offer up a far better question; "better" because it is going to lead to a direct answer. How much is the mind of the gardener the same mind as the cabbages'? Actually, long ago I found myself treating my garden as if it were more a being than a thing. I imbued the subject of this passion with a life of its own. At some point, that which was thought of as conscious, was soon treated as conscious, and was finally regarded in every detail as conscious. How else does anyone go about developing a passion for something if not by imbuing the subject of his or her passion with a life all its own?

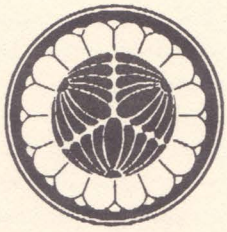
Nor can I deny that this is a very personal issue for me, now suddenly gone public. What is actually an ephemeral, constantly changing, and entirely *unspoken* process, has just gotten translated into English. In the process, it got altered into an irrevocable, unchanging, cast-in-concrete process known as comic prose.

However, let it also be noted that this is *not* a case of hearing birds sing and calling them cabbages. Nor is it a case of hearing birds sing and calling them angels.

It is, instead, a case of hearing both the cabbages *and* the birds sing, knowing them as cabbages and birds, and acknowledging them in the same spirit of conviviality that any true believer would acknowledge an angel. Regard this explanation of it as one small step in my own long overdue reinvestiture of the sacred. It is regarding nature as she is—our spiritual home.

And maybe someday, even the lowly human race will learn how to communicate with the rest of nature.

—Jim Nollman



Stylized Cabbage, from a Japanese Crest

Book Reviews

❖ Sacred Places ❖
How the Living Earth Seeks our Friendship

by James A. Swan, published by Bear and Company of Santa Fe.

A remarkable little book from a publisher that seems to specialize in remarkable little books that discuss the reinvestiture of the spiritual into our lives. This one focuses on the power of sacred places around the planet. I regard Swan's book as one of a small breed of books that successfully translates traditional spirituality into modern terms without losing the heart in the process. It makes me want to visit more of these sites and stay longer.

..."Modern medicine has until recently given little attention to the power of place in aiding healing. This is somewhat out of keeping with its traditions, as its Greek father, Hippocrates believed that some places had healing values for certain diseases, while others seemed to make people worse."

❖ The Souls of Animals ❖

by Gary Kowalski, published by Stillpoint, Walpole NH.

This is a 'bridging' book that illuminates the long overdue connection that must develop between animal rights advocacy and spiritual ecology. It starts from the premise that animals are people, and then draws a respectful picture of their richly varied personalities, intellect and especially their artistic talents. In that last, lies my only nagging complaint. Kowalski puts too much emphasis on any animals "talent" to emulate humans. On the other hand, what Koko the Gorilla has to say about death puts the entire thesis of the book on very firm footing.